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SONGS OF CHANGING SKIES

SONGS OF CHANGING SKIES

BY

JOHN PRESLAND

AUTHOR OF "MANIN AND THE DEFENCE OF VENICE"
"MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS," "THE DELUGE
AND OTHER POEMS," ETC.

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1913

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SONGS OF CHANGING SKIES

In Memoriam

ANDREW CHATTO

March 15th, 1913

WE have loved you, we who stand in sunlight,
And watched your slow steps going down the hill,
And, when at last you vanished in the shadows,
We prayed to see you still.

Where you are now, friend so gentle-hearted,
Is without our knowledge; this we see,
That, to the last, upon each stage you travelled
A light burns steadily.

We had you, and we have not any further
Upon our journey, yet one thing is sure,
The reverence for such a noble spirit
Remains—and will endure.

TO ROBERT BROWNING

BROWNING, in all the pattern of my life
Are your words interwoven; still a child
I read your tales of honest blood and strife,

Noble endeavours, and adventures wild
(Such as will sting young ardent blood to flame)
Stands for the King; and glory, undefiled

By thought of pain, but war, like a good game
Played by heroic schoolboys; o'er your page
The sound of galloping hoofs, and rung steel
came.

Later I read, what, in my earliest years,
I had but guessed at, known the name, no more,
Nor cared to fathom, till, from stage to stage,

I came with you, from deeds done, to ignore
The act in the desire, know the hearts
Of all your men and women, praised the more

This wonderful, great world, whose complex parts
You saw, and seized, and make us understand,
As *I* did, through you, though in fits and starts,

Grappled my ignorance to your sure hand,
And so got pulled to knowledge. I had learned,
While yet my life was all a virgin land,

Some of the faith that bravely in you burned,
That, in the vilest, by the patient eye,
A little spark of good may be discerned.

So, in the dark times, when the hours go
Heavily in the leaden wintry ways,
And the sick body and the sick mind know

Darkest oppression, surely my hand stays
Upon your book; I open it, and read
The wise great music of your later days,

When your own soul, of lesser greatness freed,
That pleased your younger years, saw, from a height,
Greatness and littleness work for God—your creed!

For you believed in goodness, wrong from right
Pointed and named, nor did your search desist,
Till clean through semblance you found truth
alight.

I've read you on the house-tops; on sun-kissed
And sea-girt Capri, where the lemon trees
Hang out pale moons, and cactus-bushes twist,

And throw strange shadows, shifting as the
breeze
Varies, contorted into hideous shapes,
Like some obscene old monster of the seas.

And on pale mornings, when the peaks and
capes
Merge hazily into a sea all pearl,
Silent beneath a misty veil that drapes

All outline, as its changing spirals curl,
While cypresses, like triangles of doom,
Mark the white houses, and the buds unfurl

On half-seen rose-trees in the garden's gloom;
In such a breathing silence once I leaned
To catch the morning twilight, from my room,

Upon the page; and from your wisdom gleaned
Some knowledge of my own soul's right and wrong:
A white star burned, all life was raised and cleaned

By certain words of yours, written so long
Ere I was born, and, after I am old
—Such power have words—still to be sweet and strong.

But those are secret hours, past and cold,
Which you have shared; and now I love the best
To read you as this afternoon, where rolled

The green, smooth downs, and I lay on the crest
Of a chalk cliff, all round the grass, strong, clean,
And honest smell of earth; and, where I pressed

With sharper dig of elbow, odour keen
Of thyme, and there beyond, where grasses wave
Over the cliff's edge, all the blue is seen

White-foam capped by the frolic wind; and
brave,
The little snails, and grasshoppers, and bees
Pursue their business (may such business save

And prosper!) heedless where I lie at ease,
Reading and dreaming, listening to the lark,
Seeing the thistles in the strong June breeze

Shake at the cliff's edge, till I fail to mark
Where dreaming o'er you ends, and real sleep
gains,
And sense slips into that warm-scented dark

Of close-shut eyelids; yet your loved refrains
Mix in my eased half-consciousness, I know,
With lark, and rustle of grass, and all attains
Symphonic Nature—and you'd have it so.

OUTSIDE CANOSSA

NO sound; not even the wolf's bark
In the far forests, nor the flap
A solitary crow's wings make; but stark
Lies all the world, and like a shroud
The falling snow-flakes softly wrap
The rigid country-side from sight.
There was no movement, save the snow
Sliding from off the burdened branch
With sound just more than silence. Now the light
The Eastern mirk just lifts to show
Wearily from the sick sunrise,
Struggling a moment in the sky;
Then shuts once more the heavy cloud;
And still the snow falls, piling high,
Against the massive castle walls—
Outlining tower and battlement,
Corbel and ledge and window-sill,
Piled on each rough-carved ornament
Wherever it may cling, and fill
Each hollow, clings the snow, until
The soft mass, overweighted, softly falls.

But, in the tent, the candles burn
In jewelled sconces, all around
The silk-hung walls, and on the ground
The bears' and foxes' sombre pelt,
Beside the milk-white sheepskins, heap
The floor and couch; and tapestry
Which queens in long captivity
Had woven, shields the sullen King.
Silence around the courtiers keep,
For somewhat too caressingly
Does pluck and play that nervous hand
With that bejewelled dagger; now,
Making the light run up the blade
In serpentining fire; now stand
Steady upon the steel; now leap
Forwards and backwards like a thing afraid.
Or, flashing from the rubies, loose
A fierce malignant star; in silence played
The King, his eyes upon his knife,
His teeth upon his beard.

This snowy morning makes the third
That he has lain outside the gates
Of grim Canossa, while within
Stubbornly Hildebrand awaits
Further submission; he has set
Against the monarch's will a pride
More obstinate and iron yet,

Backing the human anger with divine.
And here, without Canossa's walls,
Sits Henry, brooding in his tent;
The candle light all palely falls
Upon a silent anxious crowd,
On their own safety mutely bent,
And ready to desert their lord.
For Henry, when the envoys bowed
Before him, showing how the Pope
Scorned his request for punishment
Of traitor priests, gave rage a vent
And, with a temporal hand, uncrowned
The Pope, God's representative.
Two days among the falling snow,
Bared head, bare-footed, and ungowned
He seeks a word of Hildebrand.
For horror lies on all his land,
The dead unburied, sick unshrived,
Maidens and men unmarried, go,
And babes unchristened (if they die,
And this hard winter tries them so,
In hell for evermore shall lie),
But the accumulated hate
Of subjects, grown intolerable,
He hearkened what his friends would say,
The few last friends, not fallen away
Before the dreaded Papal ban.
And they besought him "Seek the Pope,

Seek mercy ere it be too late !
In torments do thy people die,
Praying for absolution, peace
And burial in holy ground ;
But when the trumpets shall release
The swaddled dead, dar'st thou confront
This wretched people, damned and done,
Each poor wretch hugging his own soul
Which thou hast robbed of Paradise ?
Make peace with God, ere time shall run,
And peace no more be possible."
" Fear also," had another said,
" Thine own estate ; thy friends are weak,
Thy foes with every day increase ;
Fear also, some mad wretch may wreak
The Church's vengeance, with his knife :
Make peace with God in time, make peace."

So Henry, with his babe and wife,
And some few faithful, very few,
Arrived before Canossa's gate
In this grim winter. That first day,
He stood, bare-headed in the snow,
As fits an excommunicate
(While pride within him burned and seared
At fever-heat) humbly to pray
An audience of Hildebrand.
But when the slow, dark day had waned

To night, and still no answer came,
The King, returning, shook the snow
From beard and hair, and as it rained
In glistening drops upon the furs,
The Queen herself spoke not his name,
But took and hid her little son,
Fearing his father.

Yesterday,
Speech leapt from out the King, as leaps
A sword-blade, dazzling in the sun
From out its scabbard ; as there leaps
Fire from the mountain, ere it run
Destruction-dealing, far and wide.
" Rather as Satan damned, I say,
Falling through pride, yet keeping pride,
Than buy salvation at this price,
This humble station at his gate,
While Hildebrand looks blandly out,
As hour on dragging hour I wait,
To say ' Still there ! ' and turn about
To that cold witch Matilda, with the eyes
As hard as agate ; ' Still there ! ' she replies.
Waiting ! Not heaven nor the fear of hell
Shall make me wait—who speaks of it, he dies."
Half-bitten off the phrases fell,
As he had, dog-like, worried them
Before he let them go ; the foam

Hung on his beard ; did one but shift
A weary foot, those eyes would lift
And fix him, seeking an excuse
To spill blood, for his angry soul.
So all night long had they abode,
Feeling the heavy hours roll
About them, till the morning broke,
And no one moved, and no one spoke,
And, smothered in the falling snow,
The footsteps of the sentinel
Went by ; the candles have burned low,
And silent sat in rage and woe
The King, his eyes upon his knife,
His teeth upon his beard.

Out of the gloom and piercing cold
The Queen steps ; on her ermine robe
Whiter the snow does hang in flakes,
And where her dress of broidered gold
Does cling about her feet, they lie
A moment ere they melt ; she takes
Her little son, and gallantly
Sets him upon his father's knee
—Ah, let her look, the dagger lies
Lightly across the other knee—
Quick are the heart-beats of the Queen,
But from her noble brows her eyes
Look steadily, undimmed by fear,

And royally she wears her crown.
Then turning round, with no word said,
She goes once more ; her stately tread
Is muffled, but her sweeping gown
Makes a faint music all men hear
Holding their breathing.
Through the door
The King has hurled the dagger, holds
His son against his breast, and pain
Contorts him, like a smitten oak ;
Then sets the child upon the floor,
And rises, and undoes the clasp
Of his great mantle (like a stain
Of blood it lies about his feet).
Next from his head he takes the crown,
Holds it arm's-length, and drops it down
Suddenly, from his loosened grasp,
And for the third time goes he forth,
Bare-footed as a penitent,
Humble, and excommunicate,
To stand all day in falling snow
Outside Canossa's guarded gate,
Till Hildebrand shall mercy show.

TO ITALY

September 29th, 1911

HEARKEN to your dead heroes, Italy;
Hearken to those who made your history
A bright and splendid thing, who starred your name
With such transcendent deeds, pure white, like flame,
That none might see where the old blots had been;
Oh, pause awhile to listen, and to lean
Upon that sword hilt.
What Mazzini said
Have you so soon forgotten? You, who bled
With Garibaldi, and the thousand more?
He spoke, and your young men to battle bore
His gospel with them, of men's brotherhood,
Of Justice, that before the tyrant, stood
Accusing, and of truth and charity.
His dust to-day lies with you, Italy;

Where lie his words? That sword is in your
hand
To seize unrighteously another's land—
Your fleet in foreign waters. By what right
Dare you act so, save arrogance of might,
Such cruel force as ground the Austrian heel
Upon your Lombard cities, ringed with steel
Unhappy Naples and despairing Rome,
That exiled Garibaldi from his home,
That served itself with sycophants and knaves,
That filled the prisons and the nameless graves,
Till, like a sunrise o'er a stormy sea,
Flashed out the spirit of free Italy?

Free Italy! Through blood and strife and pain
Your own land for your own sons' use you gain
And point to Europe: "Ponder on this sight,
I, with weak hands, against oppression's might
Have conquered; I have sent my young men
forth,
Unarmed, against the armies of the North,
And on my bosom felt their dying breath,
And sent their brothers to a kindred death,
And, these hurled back like a receding wave,
Have sent yet more to die upon their grave,
Till—mark, ye Powers, in your own strength
locked,
Aloof from struggling me; God is not mocked—

I conquer; let the world take heed and learn
That right must be triumphant."
Will you turn
Oppressor now, with such a history,
Italy of our love? Take Tripoli
From this poor, sick, dismembered, feeble state,
Struggling along the path you trod so late
To civic freedom, and right government?
What if you have a cause for discontent
Towards her; when a man is sick to death,
Battling for air, he has but scanty breath
For gracious compliments to standers-by.
Shall they take umbrage, help the wretch to
die?
Your past should teach you magnanimity,
The once oppressed should not oppressor be
In the turn of the scales; you, who have felt
the stick,
To try it on a weaker! A slave's trick,
Which brings to teach the lesson, never
doubt,
The slave's most potent pedagogue, the knout.

For this is sure; sow ill, and ill you reap,
For universal justice does not sleep,
And we, being strong, who take the poor man's
vine,
In our old age shall drink a poisoned wine

Grown of it, and to greed become a prey,
Die, poisoned and dishonoured.
So, to-day,
Take counsel of the noblest you have known
Before this act beyond your reach has grown.
What of Mazzini, who, for fifty years,
Lived for you only, toiled through hopes and fears,
Here, in the heart of London's saddest gloom,
Looking beyond his four-walled narrow room
Towards your glory? What of him beside,
Who ruled you Venice, and in exile died,
Defeated, outcast, penniless, bereaved,
Yet, in the greatness of his heart, believed
And prophesied your freedom; him who knew
The callousness of Europe, when there drew
Inexorably close the Austrian steel
Round weak and starving Venice, learned to feel
The sparrow's struggles in the preying beak—
What words, what words to-day would Manin speak
To Italy, oppressor, and what sword
Would Garibaldi draw to make you lord
Of barren, sun-scorched, sea-lashed Tripoli?

Wrong not yourself before us, Italy,

Lest heaven grow less heaven for the men
Who made you what you are, 'twixt now, and
then,
Drawing comparison; no, be content
To have shown the brightest purpose ever lent
By God to men, and, on your own free land,
Rule well and wisely, loose the greedy hand,
And leave such acts to nations with no past
That aught they do dishonours, first to last.

THE PANATHENAIA

ACROSS the sun-lit spaces, hot and white,
Where the shrunk shadows of the noon-day glare
Pattern the dust, we go; while, full in sight,

Salamis lies beyond the waters there
Behind us; pause a moment at the gate
To turn and see it, through the shimmering air,

And muse: "What did we understand of fate,
That day we saw the flames of Athens rise,
Watching from Salamis, for Persia's hate?

"Fear in our brain, and horror in our eyes
At that despoiling, did we understand
How gifts come through the gift of sacrifice,

"And nothing good shall fill the greedy hand,
Clutching at safety? Salamis lies there;
Here stands the Parthenon, high o'er the land

"Of Attica."—What crowds their garlands wear,
Watching the great procession, simple souls
Come from the country round, perhaps, to stare,

And point, and wonder, at the ship that rolls,
Bearing Athena's garment, for a sail,
Stretched to the winds upon its gilded poles.

Follow; climb up the steps, and see the pale
Translucent light within the colonnade,
Like delicate beauty shining through a veil,

A soft, diffused effulgence, which is made
By sun-light, mirrored from a marble floor,
And between marble columns pent and stayed.

Outside the sky burns bluely; there is more
Of heaven's light within here, lift your head,
And see the loveliness one spirit bore

To the waiting world. Ah, Pheidias, what led
The hand to this perfection? We may see
The purple, and the azure, and the red

Of that brave company, or nudity,
Whitely triumphant in its grace and ease,
Most graciously adorned, where it is free.

See how they sit, those young men, with their
knees
Firm to their horses; here one gives a glance
Back at his comrade, then another frees

His shoulders of his cloak; a gilded lance
Glitters above them; here is one who reins
With strong young hands his charger's rear and
prance

With a bronze bridle; here are tossing manes,
Wide nostrils, eager eyes, yet calmly ride
These young Athenians. What pure grace
restrains

Slow-moving women, pacing side by side
In their white garments with their offerings!
Here are the reverend elders, those who guide

The city with their counsel, wisdom clings
About them; then more horsemen, till, out-
spread,
The sweeping long procession, like great wings,

Goes round the holy dwelling; we are led
So, to the entrance, where, each on his throne,
Perfect in beauty, lofty, and most dread,

The seated gods are ranged, until mere stone
Changes to something deathless. In, go in;
Here is Athena Parthenos alone.

The first few moments does the darkness spin
About our light-drenched eyes in points of fire;
Then we see darkness; then our wide eyes win

A shape from darkness; then, as we aspire
With longing and with looking, slowly grow
Out of the lofty gloom, to our desire,

The triple peaks, bronze-gilded, that we know
Athena's helmet; then a glint of gold,
Hair of a goddess, that does spread and flow

Around that glimmering face, white, strong, and
bold,
Deathless and calm, above her watching town;
Yet with a love and pity that enfold
Us, who look upwards, by her looking down.

ADVENTURE

WHAT will you read by the fireside,
When the winter evening closes,
When the windows are shut on the wind and rain,
And the cat on the hearth-rug dozes?

I will read of the ships that sailed
Far on the Spanish Main,
And all the treasure in their holds,
Black greed, and cruelty's gain.

Full-bellied went the galleons then,
And proudly went the masters—
I see a wreck in blood-red flames,
Storms, riot, disease, disasters.

I will read of the ships that came
When Solomon ruled and builded,
With peacocks, apes and ivory—
The great tusks all were gilded.

Yearly they came from India
With treasure for Palestine;
Against the dazzling azure sea
White was the long quay-line!

The quay was stacked with gleaming tusks,
With apes in chains of gold,
And the bare, brown-bodied mariners
The bags of gold-dust rolled.

All for Solomon, sandal wood,
And the purple stuffs of Tyre,
And pepper, spice and cinnamon
Were there at his desire.

The peacocks scream along the quay,
The slaves toil in the sun,
And, in his garden: "Vanity,"
Sighs the soul of Solomon.

I will read of the ships that sailed
Where reefed spice-islands burn
In tropic seas, and deep with spoil
The battered ships return,

With tragic tales of wonderment,
Of treasure found and lost,
Of long endeavour, and adverse winds,
Stark terror, and star-crossed

Unlucky voyages, mutiny
A-barking in mid-seas,
And, black against the tropic dawn,
Still bodies on high trees.

Of all the ships that ever sailed
By known or unknown coast
We'll read the story by the fire,
But we will love the most

All stories of heroic deeds
Where just for love of right,
And not for gain nor power, men
Have sailed, and fought the fight.

A PRESENT FOR LUTHER

FINISHED at last, is it? Come and admire;
The children are crowding out there in the sunshine,
And peeping, and craning, and jumping up higher
To get a good view of the doorway that Catherine
Has made Cranach build for the dwelling of Luther.

"Is it not beautiful?" "See but the arching!"
"Our house is a palace since this has been builded."
"Ah, what will father say, when he comes marching
Home down the street again? Look, they have gilded
His arms on the corner." What, arms; peasant Luther?

One side is his head carved; great brows, eyes embedded
Beneath the steep eyebrows, eyes, forehead expressing
The soul that sought truth, and damnation less dreaded
Than to sneak unto God with the sham of confessing:
"If money saves souls, souls are lost," reasoned Luther.

This is his portrait; the strong nose, thick-rooted,
The heavy great jaw, and the mouth that so thundered,
And every base wretch with his epithet suited
With a flash on his baseness, till all the world wondered:
Whose speech ever smote and illumined as Luther's?

Had it been Catherine there on the other side,
With her Madonna-like features adorning
The door of the house that she so well had beautified

Who would have blamed? But such vanity scorning,
Her simple great soul put the arms that were Luther's.

A cross on a heart, by a white rose surrounded
(Though the cross may bring pain 'tis life-saving, life-giving),
On a field all of azure, by gold circlet bounded
(Blue heaven we mortals see o'er us when living,
Shall end in the gold of God's heaven for Luther).

This is her gift to him. How did she plan it,
Counting each thaler, as thrifty, needs must be
Good housewife and mother; and now does she scan it,
Waiting the hour, when, tired and dusty,
Shall enter his house by this doorway, her Luther.

Home from a perilous mission returning,
Doing God's work to the anger of men,
All of his heart for home-quietness yearning,
He 'lights from his horse, sees his present—and then
What words shall express all the gladness of Luther?

Much work has he known, much grief and
despair,
Stark quailings of flesh, black fears of the soul,
When out of the dark did the devil's face stare,
And all for God's glory; shall God pay the
whole?
No, earth's given recompense also to Luther.

AN ERROR OF LUTHER'S

THERE are Knipperdolling, and Krechting,
And John of Leyden too,
All prison-blanched, they are brought forth bound
To suffer the doom that their judges found
Was nothing more than their due.

They are stripped to the waist, though it's bitter cold,
And a toothed North-Easter blows;
You shall soon be warm enough, heretics,
When your flesh to the red-hot iron sticks,
Warm enough—as the devil knows!

The burghers huddle their frozen ears
Into their collars, and swear,
And blow on their fingers, and stamp their feet,
For it's bitter cold waiting here in the street
—Press close to the brazier's flare!

Three Anabaptists to meet their death
—And death shall we welcome enough !—
For the bishop has found that heaven gains
By the sight of these wretches' mortal pains.
(Such finding is common enough.)

As for Knipperdolling and Krechting
They sure will die easily;
You can see through the skin their bones stick out,
But John of Leyden is strong and stout,
And he'll bear most of the three.

There is one should have stood here, foot by foot
And hand by hand to-day;
Should have braved the fire, and scorned the cold:
"If Luther had never left the fold
We had still been sheep," said they.

Your work is it then, Martin Luther,
That these poor backs are flayed?
Are you not then come their hearts to cheer
When the dreadful hour of trial is near?
Could Luther be afraid?

It was *your* hand that lifted the latch
And opened the door of thought;
So the world rushed in, and made them free
Of every treasure; just liberty
To walk in the room you sought.

It was *your* hand that opened the dykes
And let the waters flow;
So the floods leapt out beyond your control,
And took of the harmless fields their toll
Where peasants reap and sow.

Yet far from Münster sits Luther
While John of Leyden dies:
"The devil has chosen him simple tools,
To trust his work to such arrant fools,
Such obvious fools!" he cries.

"A simple devil, a sucking devil,
A devil at A, B, C.
To come with violence, greed and lust,
And pretend that God would a message trust
To such authority!"

Wrong though they were, yet by way of wrong
May the human race arrive;
Dead is the evil thing they taught,

But the weapons of hate with which you fought—
That error is still alive.

Our human nature has sins to count
More than enough, God knows;
But this is the worst, when the prison walls
Let one escape, and his fellow calls,
To slam the gates in his nose.

THE WHEEL

WE hear the creaking of the old world's joints
In these late days; Time stiffens all the limbs,
In preparation for the hour that brims
The cup of living, and, in rigid points,
Head, hands and feet, composes the dead form.
For we are sure the children of old age,
Who see with weary eyes the rush and rage
Of the wheel's turning, and the whirl and storm
Of rising, prospering, expiring creeds.
Where is our fixed, inalterable star?
We see but the wheel turning, and from far
Feel the wrenched use of well-intentioned deeds.

For we look down the pages of the past
Seeking a law new, beautiful and strange,
That may proclaim a steady truth at last,
Immortal purpose, age-wide in its range,
Pure, beneficial; yet we stand aghast,
The only law unchangeable is change.

SOPHOCLES' ANTIGONE

THERE are fair flowers that never came to fruit;
Cut by sharp winds, or eaten by late frost,
Barrenly in forgetfulness, they're lost
To little-heedful Nature; so, in suit,
Beneath the footsteps of calamity
Young lives and lovely innocently come
To total up old evil's deadly sum—
Do the gods pity dead Antigone?
We look too close, we look too close on earth
At good and evil; blind are Nature's laws
That kill, or make alive, and so are done.
Not in the circle of this death and birth
May we perceive a justifying cause,
Beyond, perhaps, for God and good are one.

A SONNET OF COMPENSATION

IN Paradise there is no joy of spring,
For there's eternal summer; no quick rush
Of gladness to the soul, when that first flush
Of the promised year (which certain days can bring,
Even in February's bitterness)
Shows the brave struggle upwards of a flower,
An aconite or snowdrop; that's the dower
Hard winter gives, and winter-weariness.
Grief has its worth, and winter, and dark days,
And weight of human cares that burden us,
And short enduring of poor, mortal breath,
For, like the seed, in dark and silent ways
Hope moves to growth: think, now, how luminous
Is Love, being always in the shadow of Death.

FIRELIGHT

OUT of my brain I sit here spinning
  Fancies without end,
And thoughts take shape without beginning,
  As wreaths of smoke ascend
From out this fire by which I'm sitting,
  And formlessly they gain,
Sinking, rising, twisting, flitting
  In an idle brain.

I think how, in another sphere,
  I might have reached you out a hand
That should have helped you; help was near,
  Yet you without it stand.

All your soul's ecstasy for good
  I might have pointed to an aim;
Lance-like and keen it then had stood
  To glorify your name.

The lesser you had sunk away
  Before the faith that I should find,
Fresh to the needs of every day,
  And obstinately blind

To every failure, till, at last,
  We should have fashioned, you and I,
A splendid future from your past
  To stand eternally.

Very still I sit here thinking ;
  The hand ticks round the clock ;
The hour is late and the fire sinking ;
  It's strange how fancies knock
Still at your brain, like voices shrilling,
  What had helped you most ?
Could life for you have been fulfilling ?
  —The fire's like a ghost.

NIGHT IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

WAKEFUL, I've heard the silences of night
Over the sleeping earth, and I've leaned long
Out of my window, to catch the secret song
That the wind makes across the barren fens,
Where, challenging, the road winds, high and white.

On goes the wind ; far off, yet hard and loud,
A horse's hoofs beat on the level road,
Bound, surely, for the magic, dark abode
Of some Elf-King : high in the windy sky
One star does battle with the streaming cloud.

A PICTURE BY YOSHIO MARKINO

THE few tall poplars in their autumn gold
Are like pale flames, that waver through the mist
Up to the guessed-at heaven; yet they move
No more than trees of faëry, magic-kissed
Within enchantment's circle, which can hold
A moment's space from motion their strange grace,
And never loose them; water round them lies,
Wherein, as echoed music, one may trace
Their delicate and insubstantial guise
Multiplied, as in memory, manifold.

ATLANTIC ROLLERS

DO you dare face the wind now? Such a wind,
Bending the hardy cliff-grass all one way,
Hurling the breakers in huge battle-play
On these old rocks, whose age leaves Time behind,
—The whorls and rockets of the fiery mass
Ere earth was earth—shoots over them the spray
In furious beauty, then is twisted, wreathed,
Dispersed, flung inland, beaten in our face,
Until we pant as if we hardly breathed
The common air. See how the billows race
Landward in white-maned squadrons that are shot
With sparks of sunshine.
Where they leap in sight
First, on the clear horizon, they fleck white

The blue profundity ; then, as clouds shift,
Are grey, and umber, and pale amethyst ;
Then, great green ramparts in the bay uplift,
Perfect a moment, ere they break and fall
In fierce white smother on the rocky wall.

IN EARLY SPRING

THE flower in the earth, the sap in the bud, the bird in the tree,
Who shall interpret, singing, the wonder of these—
The clear, pale, sunset sky, and the clouds that running free,
Sunny, towards the eve of a day of rain and breeze?

Oh, wonder of waking earth, what wakens within our heart,
When skeleton stand the trees against the grey,
And suddenly, lilacs are green, and suddenly, small buds start
Out of the bleak, black stems that were dead but yesterday?

And the dim, grey vistas of grass beneath the naked trees
Give up their loveliest sight, the glimmering crocus-hosts,

Yellow and white and mauve, token of life's release
Out of the earth again; less beauty, than beautiful ghosts

Of what shall be, triumphant, in the largesse of mid-May,
The bounty of blossom and leaf; yet lovelier still than these,
Being beauty half-conceived in the spirit, shut away
From tongue that praises the rose, and eye the rose that sees.

Surely not yet the Spring. Yet how shall Spring bestow
Half of this promise she makes, when the source of life she frees,
When to shake the willow-tassels the winds titanic blow,
And all the sun is given to light the almond trees?

FROM A WINDOW

TO-NIGHT I hear the soft Spring rain that falls
Across the gardens, in the falling dusk,
The Spring dusk, very slow;
And that clear, single-noted bird that calls
Insistently, from somewhere in the gloom
Of wet Spring leafage, or the scattering bloom
Of one tall pear-tree.
On, on, on, they go,
Those single, sweet, reiterated sounds,
Having no passion, similarly free
Of laughter, and of memory, and of tears,
Poignantly sweet, across the falling rain,
They fall upon my ears.

DIANA IN THE WOOD

LOVER, pursuing
The footsteps of her who flies,
Ah lover, wooing
The untroubled, the virgin eyes,
Which have seen no tears but April showers,
So quickly dried,
And shining on the rain-swept flowers;
Eyes clear and wide
Where the ache of love and the passionate pang
No shadow have made;
Shadowless, proudly, goes she through the wood,
Light-footed, unafraid.

She is not yours, oh lover, lover;
This is Diana the Maid:
None has possessed her, none has known,
She goes her way aloof, alone,
She is no man's, nor yours.

Though you follow, seize her at the last,
And where the moss is green,

And all the blue-bells like a tender mist
Light the dim hollows with the azure sheen,
Although you hold her fast,
'Tis not your love, Diana, you have kissed,
It is a woman in her semblance made,
Who may be wooed and won,
Be won, and weep.

So, when the hour's blinding joy is past
You will awake, as if from sleep,
You will arise, from arms that hold you fast;
You will arise
And cruelly see, with cruel, discerning eyes
This is not she,
Whom you pursued
Adown the green isles,
Not she, you loved and wooed
With hands, and lips, and eyes, and broken
words,
Not she, who ever smiles,
Not she, who ever flies,
Diana, the huntress, the goddess,
Who has the Sun-god for her brother,
Whose passage is swift as a bird's,
Whose footstep is light by the river,
Whose arrows are sharp in her quiver,
Not she, who escapes, who eludes,
But a woman, another.

A NORTHERN NIGHT

THE daisies all are folded fast asleep
Although the light still lingers in the sky,
Eastward and westward, even the dark North
Leans down upon this June earth tenderly,
Most delicately sun-lit; back and forth
The swallows, eager-winged, do poise and sweep.

There is not now a single moving air
To stir along the cliff the summer grass
That's grown so tall, nor yet the columbines
The butterflies set trembling as they pass,
So light they are; the sunset widely shines
Across the western bay, rock-strewn and bare.

Oh, magic beauty of a Northern night!
These lingering, faint gloamings that stretch hands
Out to the far, pale dawns; now, when the smell
Of hawthorn hedges, in the pasture lands,
Has so much sweetness that we cannot tell
Whether most pain we feel, or most delight.

It is such hours as these when one should stay,
Unmoving, in a shadow-haunted copse,
Scarce breathing, hearing a bat's wings go by,
Till, through the stillness, there vibrates, and stops,
That long, first dropping note of melody,
One note; then silence steals the sound away.

It would be night then; dark the homes of men,
The twinkling lights put out; the country-side,
So day-familiar, all as strange would seem
As those lost lands that lie beneath the tide,
Those fair, lost lands, whose very names do dream,
Strange-syllabled; yet we should find them then,

And standing in the gardens Queens had known
In vanished, summer nights, we'd hear the song
Beneath whose sweetness all the heart is crushed
By yearnings that to deathless things belong,
Yet, when at last the nightingale was hushed,
Best were that silence; love would speak alone.

LOVE'S TIDE

THE exquisite desires of the Spring
Are all to love, O Love!
The countless wonders that the hours bring,
The sunlight from above
On such Spring mornings, keen and clear as truth,
And bright with all the panoply of youth,
These golden mornings cry aloud of love.

The birds, too, sing of it—ah, there, the birds,
Love's priests and prophets!—Nothing earthly soars
So far from earth as they,
And "Love, Love, Love" with inarticulate words
They cry aloud all day;
Piercing or plaintive, from the lark that pours
Its more than human music from the skies,
To the small sound of sparrows in the rain,
They have no other song.

And we, who take this beauty in our eyes
And in our ears and brain,
We feel its message almost as a pain,
And cry out for the wrong
That Nature does us.—Now the chestnut trees
Are bannered broad with green, and plum and
pear
Drift their light blossom down the fitful breeze
That dances visibly;
And great white clouds lean out across the blue
To throw their shadow, yet, ere one can see
The sun is covered, the sun flashes through,
Terribly bright and living. Oh, indeed,
This sunshine of the Spring is blinding me,
This stir and murmur, and this flush and flow
Of all deep forces freed
That our earth lives by; all one way they stream
Like the strong-setting tide of a great sea.

Yet life has miracles; for this we know
That love may make the human soul so strong,
That, against longing, it shall turn and go
Into the darkness where the black doubts throng,
Sharp-beaked, and iron-clawed,
It shall lose everything, believing so
That serving most, it most to love shall grow,
And find in Love's supreme self the reward.

THE WEB OF SPRING

GODS of the Spring, unravel the web,
  Unravel the web you weave
Of colour and sound and blossom and gleam,
Of leaping water and flying beam,
  And trees that ruffle and heave.

The waves of green roll over the land,
  On the birches they hang like spray,
O'er chestnut and elm and beech they pour,
And even the hornbeams, grey before,
  Give the full green tide its way.

There are mornings of sun, and madcap birds
  —Oh the triumph of songs they sing!—
There are noons of cloud, and scurrying rain,
And tossed, wet branches, and sun again,
  And evenings, Gods of the Spring,

Of a tender lingering light that stays
  To a ghostly moon, rose pale,

When the riot is hushed, and the wood is still,
And the winds are calmed on the windy hill,
  And the ground-mist lies like a veil.

And I see it all behind bars, I think—
  It is loveliness, yet pain ;
Through the winter I gathered my soul to wait
For each of the glories, and now too late
  Will the hawthorns blossom again.

Since love is the soul of the Spring, O Gods,
  And loveless must soulless be ;
Then weave or rend the web as you will,
'Tis a semblance of happening for others still,
  But no happening for me.

"THE MOON HAS SET AND THE PLEIADES"

THERE is no moon, and all the stars
Are clouded by the wind that came
From that pale sunset in the Bay,
Landward; a wind that brought the rain,
Which now, about this weary hour,
I hear go dripping from the eaves,
And pattering on road and roof,
And gurgling from the water-spouts,
And blown in melancholy gusts
About my window—Oh, the sound
Of rainy midnight, and the lonely wind.

*"ἔρως ἀνίκατε μάχαν"

WHO has said that Love is pleasant?
Not the lover; never
He who has felt the longing gnaw,
And fret his being with tooth and claw,
Beast-wise, save his love be present.

Joyous is Love? Or splendid?
Had one joy of it ever?
Joy of a hope that falls on air,
And a dark day, closing a morning fair,
And those hours unbefriended?

You, to whom unrevealed
Is Love's endeavour
On body and soul, oh, pray; and you
Who felt it once, and then outgrew
This plague, in us concealed;

Pray, that it may be hidden
Till the last day sever
Those halves, that never make a whole,
Harsh-yoked, the body and the soul,
Lest also you, hag-ridden,

* Sophocles' "Antigone."

Daily and nightly stumble,
—For Love drives ever—
Pray for no love; and pray again,
Of grace, for us, who feel the pain
Of sharp desire grope, and probe, and fumble.

TEMPTATION

THE curtains drawn on the window pane,
Where the cold rain drips;
And a fire that sinks and leaps again,
And we two at grips;

We two in this room alone to-night,
Where the slow clock ticks,
And one is my soul, that strives for right,
Through a maze of tricks;

And one is the devil, whose aspects change
With the rise and fall
Of the whispering flames, and deadly strange
Are each and all,

And before my weary brain they drift
In this quiet room,
Where the secret noises whisk and shift
Across the gloom.

The world and its familiar things
Are far away,
And the commonplace, to which one clings
In homely day,

Gone—gone! my soul must meet the ill,
And fight it out,
And from the corners peering still,
Its shape is doubt.

In shadowy corners it gibbers and mows,
When the bright flame dies,
And it leaps at me, when the fire glows,
With a hundred eyes.

Its tentacles do writhe and coil
To drag me in,
Its mouths gape for their human spoil,
As black as sin.

Oh truth, oh loveliness, oh light,
Oh trust and love,
I yearn up to you, clean and bright,
Shining above,

As one, who, in the miry ways,
Struggles and sinks,
Looks upwards to the stars and prays
Before he drinks

The bitter draught of death; so I
Helplessly call,
Hearing the heavy hours go by,
And the slow ash fall.

OF CONSCIENCE

WE clamour heavenwards, caught as in a net
Of sorrows; vainly we demand a sign,
The heavens parting, and the word divine
Thunderously uttered, lest we may forget
Its message, yet in speech familiar
To human ears; groping, we stumble yet,
And, bruised and bitter, with our cries beset
The placid sky, and Him who dwells afar.
Oh, human folly! Eyes we have to see
Justice and beauty, and in us abides
The very voice of God, and that keen, white,
Dread sword of God, that all unerringly
Upon its edge evil from good divides—
Sharp, sharp the line that cuts the Infinite.

"E TENEBRIS LUX"

THE root of love is in self-sacrifice,
Although joy crown it, as the rose the tree;
For not alone the sun and air suffice
To nurture that full beauty, but the toil
Of great earth-forces, that move silently.

Ay, love shall come to find its loveliest part
In that dark stillness, which the impulse gives
To bud and blossom. Surely knows the heart
Love is most love grown in an earthly soil,
And in death's shadow most eternal lives.

BEETHOVEN'S ADELAIDE

TO love and have; ah, that is joy,
Joy such as birds have, and young things
When the blood leaps, and the year brings
Blossom and growth, in sun and shower;
But what the years bring, years destroy.

To love, and want, and wanting, grow
Still to such perfect full possession
Of the beloved, as nought can lessen,
Not Time, nor Death's compelling power—
What joy shall love like this bestow?

VIA DOLOROSA

THERE is a perilous journey of the soul,
Hedged round with dangers, worse than e'er befell
Ulysses, when he journeyed into hell,
Or steadfast Harold, as he sought his goal
Across the curséd country ; when it goes
Into the caves of doubt where no stars shine
To tread a path by, neither sound nor sign
Save the dim radiance from itself that flows.

Yet must the soul, that will the blessing gain
Of sure, firm truth, to which it lives and dies,
To its own conscience (often incomplete
To others), tread its special way of Pain
Until it reach conclusion in some wise.
It may be, sitting at Another's feet.

THE MEASURE OF THE SOUL

BEAUTY is boundless; endless; without age;
And past the feet of all men does it roll;
Yet each may have no more than his own soul
Holds in its cup, his longing to assuage.
And some their lovely vessels, jewel-set,
Deep-curving, fill with beauty to the brim,
To quench a god's thirst; others, at the rim
Of broken cups their eager lips must wet.
And some there are, who, longing most, must stand
All empty-handed; humbly must they lean
To taste the drops they gather in their palm,
Yet, lacking so their little, wholly grand
By them the Unattainable is seen,
A great, unfathomed ocean, vast and calm.

DAILY BEAUTY

I HAVE loved the faces of all yearly days,
Mornings, and noons, and night-times, and those pale,
Long, twilight dawns of summer, and the tale
Of summer hours, wrapped in golden haze,
And rhythmical with bees. I love the ways
Of all the wind-gods, from the morning squall
The Spring sends, furious yet fanciful,
Across the copses, where the blackbird stays
Its note a moment, to the tearing gale,
That on the toothed and clawed Atlantic coast
The wild grey wolves of running rollers frees.
All days are fair, yet certain days prevail
Over my spirit, to be loved the most,
Those that are beautiful with memories.

TO D——

OTHERS there may be greater; there are few
More steadfast in their purpose for the right,
More straightly pointing up towards the light,
More pure of will and effort, or more true
To their best nature: failure in effect
There has been and there must be, to renew
The impulse, by such means the spirit grew
To this height, by such means shall be elect.
This is a soul that never thought to hoard
The riches Nature gave, nor in vain ways
Squandered itself; but every attribute
Matched to the need: most love it could afford
To loveless people, groping through dark days,
Yet bless its chosen mate with love's best fruit.

HENRY NEWBOLT

THERE is a soul that dwells aloof and calm
From all our modern times' continual fret,
Withdrawn into itself, or proudly set
Upon a lofty hill-top, whence the harm
Of vain, ignoble strivings, shrill alarm,
And brazen clamour, and the dust and sweat
Can hardly be perceived, or, known of, yet
Only by more his placid soul to arm.
Great thoughts of noble deeds, present and past,
Are his companions; should he stoop to grasp
At popularity, who walks with Drake,
Or praise of little men, whose voices rasp?
As largesse to us are his verses cast;
Yet every piece true gold, for his own sake.

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